

## **THE COMING TRANSFORMATION OF THE U.S. MILITARY?**

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**The 9/11 attacks reawakened the U.S. to the fact that the world is a hazardous place deserving renewed vigilance and a proactive foreign policy. State or non-state, future enemies will be empowered by the same global trends that give terrorists access to fluid financing, decisive information, freedom of movement, and weapons of mass destruction. Future foes -- particularly non-state enemies -- will change the nature of warfare so as to strip the U.S. of its overwhelming advantage in conventional warfare. The threats will be global and amorphous, changing form and tactics frequently while seeking to increase their lethality and attack states where they are weakest. The wars of the future will likely contain no front lines, and America's foes will make little distinction between combatant and civilian.**

**The U.S. is unlikely over the next 25-30 years to face an adversary challenging its military in a symmetrical fashion. This is important, given that the American military devotes the great majority of its resources to preparing for a symmetrical fight, retaining an establishment that seeks to fight the "Third World War" but along fundamentally World War II or Cold War lines.**

**It is not enough simply to be told that the threats of the future are not the threats of the past: an institution expected to undertake a cultural, organizational, and doctrinal transformation must at least see the outlines of its style of warfare for the future. The military will need strong civilian leadership and a geostrategic rationale for its transformation. It must see the outlines of its style of warfare for the future. Characteristics are emerging of a new style of warfare that we call Decisive Action, which draws upon lessons learned in past ways of American warfare. Decisive Action is not merely an amalgamation of the best characteristics of past doctrines, it is a way of warfare for the future.**

### **THE AMERICAN WAYS OF WAR**

**The twentieth century became the "American century" because of U.S. industrial strength and entrepreneurial genius, which propelled the country to superpower status and shaped its way of war and strategic culture, for which historian Russell Weigley coined the term "the American way of war." The leitmotif of this was the prolonged mobilization of massive American forces followed by attrition-minded warfare that would eventually wear down the enemy, taking advantage of America's superior technology and industry. Total victory and complete defeat of the enemy was the goal. But later, in the years following World War II, the development of nuclear weapons and the Cold War with the Soviet Union made this style of warfare only partially useful.**

**After 1949, total war in the context of the conflict with the Soviet Union meant a possible global nuclear confrontation. The many small advances made by world communism in the 1950s and early 1960s convinced strategic thinkers and**

eventually President Kennedy that the U.S. needed a more flexible doctrine for the use of force. This led to the Limited War school of American strategic thought (c. 1950-1984), exemplified by post-MacArthur Korea and Vietnam, which centered on more subtle applications of military force. Robert Osgood, who articulated much of the doctrine, called Limited War "an essentially diplomatic instrument. . . Military forces are not for fighting but for signaling." Thomas Schelling, another limited-war theorist, noted that the use of military force should rest on tacit understanding of each other's war aims. Due to fears of the Soviet response and escalation, decisive military outcomes were not necessary or even desirable. The underlying logic also had a scientific component. To control this more subtle application of force, the strategic decisions would be highly centralized, and made by civilians.

The U.S. military's criticism of Vietnam, where scientific calculations about the application of limited force against an opponent who was fighting a total war backfired, led to the downfall of the doctrine. Military reformers sought to create a new doctrine that they themselves would control following a war. For these reformers, the decisive military engagement and the need to attack and destroy the enemy at his "center of gravity" needed to be reinstated in American military strategy. The political signaling of Limited War had led to needless military sacrifices in Vietnam and much toil that in the end did not contribute to the war goals. Even worse, it had ceded the initiative of action to the enemy. To the reformers, President Johnson's reluctance to widen the Vietnam war led to a strategy that preferred military operations that were controllable over those that were decisive and successful.

The revamped U.S. military doctrine of the 1980s restored the primacy of combat engagements and decisive victory. After the failed 1980 hostage rescue attempt in Iran and the 1983 bombing of U.S. barracks in Beirut, the Pentagon heralded the official arrival of this doctrine, generally known as Overwhelming Force. Articulated by Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger and Army General Colin Powell, this strategic doctrine (c. 1984-1993) responded to the problems of Limited War as applied in Vietnam. It centered on the tenets that the U.S. military must have clear objectives, the necessary means to achieve those goals decisively, and popular support. It restored decisive battle and operational victory as the centerpiece of any strategic campaign and highlighted the need for U.S. military forces to retain the initiative of action and keep the enemy in a reactive posture. As the underlying logic had shifted away from science and back toward the military's operational concerns, the strategic decisions were dominated by the military (or sympathetic civilian leaders).

While the Reagan-era build-up of the military certainly provided policymakers with expanded means for applying Overwhelming Force, the underlying conditions of international politics and certain legacies of Vietnam led to reluctance to use it. On the one hand, it could be seen as a prescription for inaction. Only a few complex conflicts had the characteristics that could satisfy its conditions for American military and political success. While the military found comfort in a doctrine that

would call for them to fight only when success was assured and the cause important, political leaders considered it inflexible. Heightened sensitivity to military casualties among both political and military leaders made the doctrine's employment even more rigid. Nonetheless, the successful uses of force in Panama and the Persian Gulf were seen as proving its value.

The election of Bill Clinton and the changed international landscape following the demise of the Soviet Union ushered in the era of Precision Strikes (1993-2001), built on three assumptions: that most conflicts in which the U.S. might want to use military force were FOR very low geopolitical stakes for which Americans would not want to suffer casualties; that the political focus should be domestic; and that technological advances allowed the U.S. to hit targets with great precision from long ranges, with minimal risk to U.S. military personnel. The rationale for this doctrine was cemented in October 1993, when eighteen U.S. Army troops were killed in Mogadishu, Somalia, while acting to hunt down and capture Somali warlord Mohammed Farah Aidid. Literally gun-shy after that action, the Clinton administration came to favor multilateral actions in dealing with the ethnic conflicts and humanitarian disasters of the post-Cold War era. When more unilateral uses of force were necessary, the administration favored high-technology means such as air strikes and cruise missiles -- as in the strikes against Iraq, Al Qaeda camps in Afghanistan, and the El Shifa pharmaceutical plant in Sudan, and in Kosovo. (An exception was Haiti in 1994, a mission conducted on the model of overwhelming Force but without that doctrine's decisiveness. Within two years of America's leaving, the island was hardly better off than before the American invasion.) In the main, during the Clinton years military force was seen as a low- risk, symbolic measure with coercive overtones that was meant to show American displeasure or to shape diplomatic conditions.

Unfortunately, precision-strike warfare seemed to reinforce a self-fulfilling prophecy among political leaders that the American people are not willing to take casualties. Meanwhile, the Clinton administration's handling of both domestic and international terrorism as law enforcement issues seemed to embolden enemy leaders such as bin Laden into believing that the American people would call for disengagement at the first casualty. Al Qaeda thought that Sept. 11 would prove the U.S. was a "paper tiger" and hoped the Bush administration would respond as its predecessor had before.

What we call the Bush administration's Decisive Action doctrine restores the importance of significant combat operations and operational victories. However, it also recognizes that the old "American way of war" is far from useful in today's geopolitical environment. Decisive Action envisions formulating strategy, force structure, and the military personnel system to take advantage of technological advances that give the American military the capability of being stealthier, more lethal, able to strike from longer ranges, more agile, more survivable, and able to operate without huge logistical trains or vulnerable bases near the conflict.

**A Decisive Action model can be seen in Afghanistan, where efforts have combined the limited political goals of Limited War and the technology underpinning Precision Force with the military logic and political decisiveness underlying Overwhelming Force. Decisive Action is both limited and precise, but by emphasizing operational military considerations and returning to a focus on decisive combat engagements and victories, it retains the initiative of action for U.S. forces. It departs from its immediate predecessor in emphasizing risk-taking (especially with ground forces), the importance of coercive force decisively wielded to compel the enemy into a course of action on the ground, and using high technology to soundly defeat enemy military forces while denying foes the ability to strike American forces where the U.S. is vulnerable (such as large logistics bases).**

**However, the U.S. still must develop a strategy centered around a suite of military capabilities that can be used to defeat both conventional and unconventional foes. The Pentagon, Congress, and the defense industry must wean themselves off the "death spiral" of procuring ever more Cold War tanks, ships, and planes rather than the capabilities today's technology allows and tomorrow's battlefield successes demand. The military must also replace a backward-looking personnel system with one that encourages entrepreneurial leaders on both the battlefield and in the staff offices.**

## **STRATEGY**

**Any conception of American military strategy in the war on terrorism and beyond must begin with the reality that the military is only one of many tools available for concluding a conflict and deterring future threats. It will be useful in certain contingencies (such as Afghanistan) and largely ineffective in other areas (such as interdicting Al Qaeda's monetary flows and tracking individuals' movements). When military force is necessary its goal should be to attain tactical or operational victory and help shape the international or regional political environment in ways favorable to U.S. strategic interests.**

**Decisive Action cannot be a one-size-fits-all concept. The U.S. military will need to tailor-fit force packages to needs as they arise across the range of homeland defense, rapid power projection, conventional operations, special operations, and constabulary missions. American dominance in areas such as precision strike, global projection, and command, control, communications, computers, and intelligence (C4I) will be invaluable in meeting all these contingencies.**

**Furthermore, American military strategy must not rely on high technology "silver bullets" to always carry the day, particularly with regard to air power and precision-guided munitions. While air power is a fearsome and efficient weapon, it works best in concert with ground forces, as seen in Kosovo and Afghanistan, where ground forces engaged enemy formations and brought them into the open and spotters used laser designation and identification devices to bring effective and accurate firepower to bear. Geography remains the key strategy shaper. Air power and cruise missiles have helped overcome the tyranny of distance." B-2 Stealth**

**Bombers can take off from Missouri and strike at any target globally, and the U.S. Navy has a global presence that places ship-launched cruise missiles or attack aircraft within close proximity to virtually every potential hotspot. The U.S. military is also the only military force able to project at least small quantities of land power to every corner of the world. Long-range transport aircraft, fast moving cargo ships, and maritime and land-based pre-positioned stocks allow for the rapid deployment of American military presence across the world.**

**Since global power projection is America's martial core competency, its military strategy should therefore be one that does not subtract resources from this source of strength. The vast majority of countries, including NATO and other U.S. allies, maintain militaries with only a regional or intrastate focus. Decisive Action will therefore require role diversification and a workable division of labor with allies. The U.S. military should continue to do a majority of the heavy lifting in areas such as rapid power projection and combat operations while other nations do the bulk of the work in areas such as peacekeeping. American diplomacy, aid, and limited numbers of constabulary forces should be used in the post-conflict setting to coordinate with allies and to shape the strategic environment in ways that further local and regional stability and peace.**

#### **FORCE STRUCTURE**

**With the possible exception of the Marine Corps and special operations forces (SOF), American forces are still not optimally organized to take full advantage of new geopolitical realities and information technology advances - - impeded as they are by their particular service cultures and reigning orthodoxies. This must change. As President Bush recently stated, "Our war on terror cannot be used to justify obsolete bases, obsolete programs, or obsolete weapon systems. Every dollar of defense spending must meet a single test: It must help us build the decisive power we will need to win the wars of the future."**

**Decisive Action will require robust American military capabilities on land, air, at sea, and in space. Forces and their weapons systems must be lethal, agile, precise, and, when possible, stealthy, but must still be able to "close with and destroy the enemy," so that land forces of the Army, Marine Corps, and SOF will continue to be indispensable. At present, only the Marines, SOF, and a limited portion of the Army are optimally organized for executing a Decisive Action strategy. The mainstream Army needs to flatten its command and organizational structures and implement Colonel Douglas MacGregor's ideas on moving toward a brigade or regimental-size organizational structure. The old division-and-corps organizational structures of the "Reforger" Army must be done away with.**

**Units such as the Interim Brigade Combat Teams that Army Chief of Staff General Eric Shinseki has proposed must move forward rapidly and be expanded. Such forces will provide a much-needed middle ground between light infantry units and formidable mechanized and armor units and can be used across the entire mission spectrum. Current plans call for only six of these types of units to be stood up, one**

of them a National Guard unit -- this number should be doubled. Meanwhile, the number of mechanized and armored forces should be cut back, and to the extent possible they should be stationed overseas to make them available for rapid-reaction contingencies. New tactical and operational doctrines are needed for all of these types of units so they can optimize IT advantages and the smaller organizational structures that will give them disproportional combat power for their sizes.

Naval and aerospace forces must also be overhauled to better provide the rapid power projection and precision strike needed for combined arms operations. The Navy must move toward procurement of ships (semi-submersible vessels containing hundreds of Tomahawk land-attack cruise missiles) for precision strikes while also maintaining an adequate surface-and-submarine fleet to patrol the sea-lines of communication necessary for global trade. The Air Force must acquire additional strategic lift, long-range bombers, and UAVs to underpin strategic agility, provide precision strike, and give real-time informational support for U.S. forces operating in areas lacking proximity to logistical facilities. The number of short-ranged, and expensive, fighter and fighter-attack aircraft should be reduced in favor of the more capable long-range bombers. Additional space-based capabilities will also be needed for advanced communications and obtaining near real-time information.

The U.S. military must ensure that communications systems are interoperable across the services and allow full integration with allies'. Off-the-shelf technologies or systems should be utilized to the full extent possible. The Marine Corps recently showed that the procurement process does not have to be unwieldy, procuring 94 commercially made Mercedes-Benz small trucks (dubbed "Interim Fast Attack Vehicles") in just two months. Under normal Pentagon procedures new vehicles generally takes five years to procure.

Above all, internecine feuds among the services must be quashed by firm civilian control. Consolidating the services is not the answer. Each of the services brings its own core competencies to the table. The only area where consolidation might make sense is in logistics and support, where it could reduce redundant capabilities and allow the services to retain more combat arms forces.

## **PERSONNEL**

A crucial element for a Decisive Action strategy would be retaining and cultivating the right types of leaders, as well as soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines who are highly trained, skilled, and motivated to carry out the strategy. In an age of increasingly "joint" forces, this is sometimes difficult. The types of leaders selected for advancement within the individual services depends on a host of qualifying factors, and much skillful navigation of the system and luck is needed for someone to accede to higher levels of responsibility.

Further complicating matters has been what Charles Moskos, America's leading military sociologist, has described as the shifting role of the officer in the military.

**Over the past fifty years the ideal officer has shifted from the combat leader to the manager or technician to, most recently, the soldier-statesman/scholar. This has led to the rise of military officers more capable in the political-military realm than in troop-leading assignments. Elevating such leaders at the expense of combat leaders can only hurt the military's ability to carry out decisive actions.**

**The military needs defense intellectuals within the ranks capable of innovative thinking. These are just as critical as skilled and able warfighters. Unfortunately, the military has historically been resistant to innovation. The services' cultures and bureaucratic interests have been an enormous barrier to change. Talented young officers are needed who can overcome this barrier to develop new military capabilities.**

**An entrepreneurial climate that rewards valor, audacity, risk-taking, and innovation should be engrained throughout the ranks, and tactical and operational commanders must be given more autonomy and trust. Without such qualities the military risks becoming what Snider, Nagl, and Pfaff term an "obedient military bureaucracy," devoid of the notion of self-sacrifice and responding to the directives of civilian leaders in an uncritical manner. The secretary of defense and the civilian service secretaries must increase oversight of the service promotion processes to ensure that the proper mix of warfighters, innovators, and soldier-diplomats are advanced through the system. All of this should be done in a top-down manner that identifies the appropriate general and flag-rank officers to drive the process.**

**One problem facing the services is that few officers or enlisted personnel actually get to ply their war fighting skills in the real world. Training facilities such as the National Training Center and the Joint Readiness Training Center are imperative for testing our leaders' mettle and evaluating our forces' doctrine against an opponent who seldom loses. Leaders and their troops should be encouraged to approach this type of training in improvisational ways. New and innovative tactics can be discovered and tested when leaders are allowed to depart from doctrine in these relatively safe training environments.**

**Such training also hones the skill and cohesion necessary for military effectiveness. Skill and unit cohesion have been shown to be as, if not more, essential than technology for battlefield success. History is replete with battles such as Rourke's Drift, Goose Green, Entebbe, and Mogadishu which have shown that skilled and cohesive units are eminently capable of overcoming numerically superior but qualitatively inferior foes.**

**Without men and women of the ideal described above, our military can only react to threats rather than forcing opponents to react to their actions. Attaining such initiative will ensure battlefield success and limit the unfortunate outcomes when American forces are caught by unpleasant surprises.**

## **CONCLUSION**

**In the new era of protracted conflict the U.S. military stands at a crossroads. Decisive Action as outlined above provides a roadmap for moving forward. Transforming the military in the areas of doctrine, strategy, force structure, and personnel policies will allow the U.S. military to triumph against terrorism and provide security and defense against other threats to national security. The political and military leadership has the opportunity to assess the future of the international environment and potential threats while the domestic political environment seems supportive for change in the military establishment. Only through such transformation will the U.S. military be able to avert future disasters or respond rapidly and decisively to bring justice to those who commit atrocities against the nation.**